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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000759

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2029
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ USES TREASON ACCUSATIONS TO TARGET
OPPOSITION

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
FOR REASON 1.4(D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Taking a relatively new tact, President Chavez used accusations of treason and paramilitary involvement June 14 to target the opposition Governor of Tachira State Cesar Perez Vivas. Several days prior, the Chavista-dominated National Assembly (AN) announced it would investigate the opposition mayor of Greater Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, also for treason. Perez Vivas and Ledezma are the two most prominent opposition officials who remain willing to publicly and belligerently fight back against Chavez, behavior that has won them some international attention but also seems likely to incite a stand-off with the Venezuelan President that they may not win. The opposition leaders who have not aggressively criticized the GBRV appear to be the ones who are not being targeted by Chavez -- yet (septel).
End Summary.

MANO A MANO

¶2. (SBU) In his weekly "Alo, Presidente" TV and radio broadcast June 14, Chavez called Governor of Tachira State Cesar Perez Vivas a fascist and accused him of paramilitary involvement and "treason against the fatherland." Tachira, which is located along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, has long suffered incursions from Colombian leftist guerrilla groups. Chavez threatened that if Perez Vivas continues with his behavior, he would end up "in Lima playing dominos with the other guy," a reference to the self-exiled former presidential candidate and mayor of Maracaibo Manuel Rosales. During the live broadcast, PSUV AN Deputy Ligia Montoya -- who was in attendance -- was run over by a bus in a fatal accident. Chavez acknowledged the death briefly during his broadcast, but continued with the show, even breaking into song shortly thereafter.

¶3. (SBU) Perez Vivas responded the following day, contending that Chavez is inventing charges as part of a "dirty war" and that he cannot take away Perez Vivas' "popular legitimacy achieved through the vote." He rejected Chavez's accusations of paramilitary involvement and claimed instead that both the Venezuelan military and Chavez were protecting and supporting Colombian guerrillas in the region. Perez Vivas also called on Chavez to meet with him to give precise information on the location of "irregular groups" in the region.

¶4. (SBU) PSUV AN Deputy Calixto Ortega announced June 10 on

state-owned Venezolana TV's "Wake-Up, Venezuela" program that the AN would set up a special commission to investigate the opposition mayor of Greater Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, on treason charges. Ortega contended that Ledezma has undertaken an international campaign against Venezuela's national interests by sending a note to the president of the Brazilian senate, Jose Sarney, asking him to thwart Venezuela's entrance into Mercosur. Ortega contended that such an action in any other country would result in legal proceedings.

COMMENT

15. (C) In taking an aggressive stance, Perez Vivas and Ledezma may be making careful political calculations. They seem to be distancing themselves from the other elected opposition officials who are trying to focus more on governing than challenging the national government (septel). With Rosales vanquished, Perez Vivas makes a natural new target for Chavez, particularly given his slim gubernatorial win in November 2008, which the PSUV has contested. However, Perez Vivas also stands to be an unexpected heir-apparent to take up Rosales's mantle as the opposition's leader -- such that it is. He is a member of COPEI with an electoral base, and is rumored to have ambitions to wrest control of the party away from its president, Luis Ignacio Planas. Perez Vivas might hope Tachira's geographic and cultural proximity to Zulia might help him win supporters from Rosales' Un Nuevo Tiempo party, which is beset by infighting and a leadership vacuum. Ledezma is struggling to remain politically relevant after being severely undercut by the creation of the new VP of Caracas and the decimation of his budget. He has little to lose at this point and appears to be making an active

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effort to be at the forefront and in the press for all the opposition's latest efforts, including the unity table, the "Globopotazo" fundraiser for Globovision, and the protest against the death of an opposition student leader (reftels).
End Comment.

CAULFIELD